

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2020

Megan J. Brennan
Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Madam Postmaster General,

My fellow members of the New York City Congressional Delegation and I write to you to express our serious concern regarding the health and safety of our local postal workers, as well as our many constituents who continue to visit post office locations while the Coronavirus pandemic increases in severity throughout our city and state, and indeed around the country. While it is critically important that we maintain essential postal services to keep society functioning, it is equally important that workers and post office visitors alike are given the tools and information needed to protect themselves from infection. Unfortunately, a recent series of troubling accounts throughout the five boroughs, including insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) and crowded lines at post office locations, have given us strong cause for concern. It is also clear from recent news reports that similar issues are prevalent in areas of the country beyond New York City.¹ We therefore request that you promptly address our concerns detailed below to ensure the Postal Service is doing everything within its power to protect human health during this pandemic.

In recent weeks, New York City has become the national epicenter of the Coronavirus pandemic.² At the time of this writing there are over 59,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New York State, and over half of those cases—more than 33,000—are in New York City alone.³ We have no doubt that by the time this letter reaches you these numbers will have increased significantly. As a result of this extreme severity, our city and state have taken extraordinary measures to slow the spread of the virus and keep the public safe. On March 22, New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo ordered all non-essential businesses to keep their workforce at

¹ Source: <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/post-office-coronavirus/>

² Source: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/20/new-york-city-is-the-new-coronavirus-epicenter-with-one-third-of-all-us-cases-mayor-de-blasio-says.html>

³ Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/nyregion/coronavirus-new-york-update.html>

home, and instituted stringent new restrictions on when and how people are allowed to move around in public.⁴

Given this unfortunate reality, we are particularly concerned for the health, safety and well-being of our local postal workers who courageously put themselves at risk each day to continue serving customers at post office locations and delivering mail throughout their communities. Similarly, we are concerned for the well-being of our constituents, many of whom have no choice but to visit their local post office to access their PO Box or receive a package. We fully understand the importance of maintaining essential Postal Service operations for a variety of reasons, not the least of which being the successful completion of the 2020 United States Census. However, simply because these operations must continue does not mean that postal workers and post office visitors should bear any unnecessary or preventable risks that could be mitigated with proper social distancing practices and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). As the federal agency in charge of managing mail delivery across the country it is your duty to take whatever steps may be necessary to ensure that workers and visitors alike are protected to the highest possible degree in these unprecedented times.

Accordingly, we ask for your immediate attention to the following matters of concern:

1. Supplies & Equipment

Throughout New York City, reports have become all too commonplace of postal workers ranging from clerks to letter carriers not having adequate amounts of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer that they need to safely perform their duties. In some instances, individual workers and worker organizations have gone so far as to purchase their own equipment to meet the needs of their members. Our congressional offices have dealt first-hand with issues around letter carriers being afraid to complete their usual routes due to a lack of PPE and fear of infection. We understand from news reports that USPS recently instituted a nationwide policy guaranteeing masks to any employee who requests one,⁵ but clearly this protocol has not yet come to fruition in New York City.

Given the reality on the ground, what immediate steps is the Postal Service taking to ensure that all New York City postal workers receive the PPE and hand sanitizer that they both need and have requested? We urge you to make masks and other essential equipment readily available to every New York City postal worker as a matter of policy, due to the severity of the crisis within our communities.

2. Social Distancing & Cleanliness

The Center for Disease Control has clearly outlined that a social distancing policy of at least six feet between all people is essential to limit the risk of transmission of COVID-19.⁶

⁴ Source: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-issues-guidance-essential-services-under-new-york-state-pause-executive-order>

⁵ Source: <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/post-office-coronavirus/>

⁶ Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

As a result of this recommendation, retailers across the country have taken steps to ensure proper distancing between customers and to bolster cleaning and sanitization protocols.⁷ Disconcertingly, we continue to hear accounts within New York City of post office customers lining up as usual to see a clerk with little to no guidance related to social distancing.

Given these accounts, what measures are being taken by the Postal Service to ensure proper social distancing in post offices, both between workers and visitors, and to keep post office locations appropriately sanitized without putting workers at further risk of infection?

3. Illness & Infection

Like all essential workers, Postal Service employees are putting their health on the line every day to perform their jobs and keep society functioning. Unfortunately, reports have already circulated about postal workers throughout our congressional districts testing positive for COVID-19.

What policies does the Postal Service currently have in place to protect workers in instances where a colleague falls ill or tests positive for Coronavirus, and how are these policies being disseminated and enforced within Postal Service facilities and local post offices?

Furthermore, we have also received accounts of postal workers being denied the ability to return to work after falling ill, despite having a note clearing them of COVID-19 from an accredited physician. We ask that you immediately look into this issue to ensure that those who are healthy and wish to return to work after an illness are able to do so without unnecessary burden.

4. Childcare Needs

Due to the severe nature of the Coronavirus in New York City, all public school buildings have closed and transitioned to remote learning.⁸ This has placed a major childcare burden on all New York City parents and guardians, and this burden is particularly acute for essential workers who continue to leave home for work during this time period.

Troublingly, we have heard reports of postal workers being routinely denied requests for changes in schedule to accommodate this new burden. We have also heard reports of workers being threatened with disciplinary action for making these requests. No worker should be threatened or disciplined for attempting to care for their children during this difficult and unprecedented time. We ask that you investigate this situation immediately

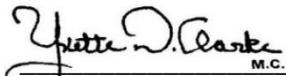
⁷ Source: <https://www.businessinsider.com/walmart-costco-target-adapt-stores-prevent-coronavirus-infection-2020-3#publix-6>

⁸ Source: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/alerts/nyc-public-schools-will-close-starting-monday-march-16-2020>

and provide further guidance on how local post offices should accommodate parents and guardians who need a change in schedule in order to look after their children.

Just because essential services must continue does not mean that we should simply accept any increased risk to human health and safety. Instead, it is the duty of leadership in this crisis to work tirelessly to determine and implement measures that will mitigate any increased risk to the highest degree possible. We will be forever indebted to the brave men and women who continue to keep our Postal Service running, and it is out of a deep care and concern for their well-being, the well-being of their families and for the well-being of all Americans during this pandemic that we request your prompt attention to these concerns detailed above.

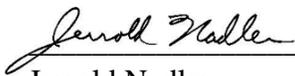
Sincerely,



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velazquez
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



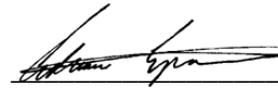
José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



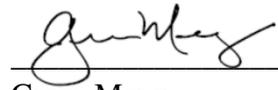
Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



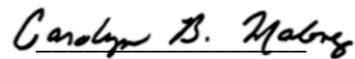
Thomas R. Suozzi
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cc:

Ronald A. Stroman

Deputy Postmaster General and Chief Government Relations Officer

United States Postal Service